

Governor Rod R. Blagojevich
Director Charles D. Johnson

July 22, 2003

SeniorCare Eligibility Extended

A state agency has extended the deadline for reapplying to a program that helps pay the cost of drugs for older people with limited incomes. The SeniorCare Program has said that it will honor expired white eligibility cards of older people, extending the expiration date from June 30 to Sept. 30, 2003.

The program, which helps older people with low-incomes pay for most prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs that are prescribed by a doctor, is supported by a federal government-state public aid partnership. Members are required to renew status annually by July 1, but a large number of beneficiaries failed to reapply in time or filed incomplete applications. The annual renewal is mandated by the federal government.

The three-month extension allows eligible seniors a second chance to renew their eligibility. Temporary SeniorCare ID cards will be mailed to all beneficiaries who did not renew. Holders of temporary cards must still reapply to get coverage after Sept. 30, 2003, the Department of Public Aid says. For seamless transition, applications should be submitted as soon as possible. If applications are not received by Aug. 15, coverage will end Sept. 30, 2003.

The July 1 issuance of new, blue cards had been set to coincide with a new Recipient Identification Number that replaces the Social Security number as the identification necessary to process claims. The temporary yellow cards will serve as the identification pharmacists need to file claims for prescriptions they have filled. The card that expired June 30 was white.

If a beneficiary presents an expired white card to a participating pharmacy, the pharmacist must verify extended eligibility and obtain the Recipient Identification Number necessary to file a claim through the electronic claims processing system. The pharmacist may also call the Health Benefits Provider Hotline, 1-800-842-1461 to verify eligibility. The pharmacist must enter the pharmacy's Medicaid provider number, then press "0" to speak to a hotline representative. When the pharmacist provides the patient's name and Social Security number, the hotline representative will provide the RIN.

It remains unclear if patients who paid cash for a prescription between July 1 and July 18 will be reimbursed. Pharmacies are not required to make refunds, but some will do so. Beneficiaries may call the Health Benefits Hotline 1-800-226-0768, for help in working with pharmacies on this issue.

The annual renewal problem was further compounded by the fact that some applications were filed by other people in behalf of elderly beneficiaries, and a new federal privacy law requires an additional form in these cases.

SeniorCare pays up to \$1,750 per person per year at no cost for people at the poverty level -- \$8,979 for singles; \$12,119 for couples. Members with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty level pay \$1 for each generic drug and \$4 for each brand-name prescription up to \$1,750; after that the members pay a \$1 fee or a \$4 fee, plus 20 percent of the cost for each prescription. The Department of Public Aid has an applicant pending with the federal Department of Health and Human Services to expand eligibility to 250 percent of the poverty level.

The SeniorCare program is different from the new drug discount buyers club that will begin Jan. 1, 2004. The Discount club is open to all Illinoisans 65 and over and has no income restriction.

SeniorCare also is different from Circuit Breaker, another program for low-income people.

Applications for SeniorCare can be obtained by calling 1-800-356-6302 or online at www.seniorcareillinois.com.

See also the tipsheet, **Questions and Answers About the SeniorCare Extension**, at www.state.il.us/aging/2t-a/seniorcare_extension-q&a.pdf.

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